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6 September 1967

STAFF NOTE

SUBJECT: Some Thoughts on White Mercenaries in Africa

The unseemly invincibility of 150 white mercenaries in their battles with Congolese military forces over the past two months is undermining the authority of the Mobutu regime and could precipitate the dissolution of Congo-Kinshasa as a state. Recently, the federal government of Nigeria has started to recruit mercenaries to help in its indecisive struggle against the Biafran secessionists, and the military regime in Ghana has expressed fears that ex-President Nkrumah may organize a mercenary force with which to shoot his way back to power. Would the white soldier of fortune prove as potent a force on the course of events in the latter two countries as in the Congo?

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1. There seems to be no shortage of potential recruits for mercenary duty in Africa. For wages of \$500 to \$3,000 per month plus looting and other "perqs," pilots, army officers,

S E C R E T

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and rankers answer the call from such organizers as South Africa's Colonel John Peters, veteran military meddler, and London's George Tavridakis, purveyor of second-hand armaments. They are recruited through contacts in a half-dozen European countries, in South Africa and Rhodesia, and, to a lesser extent, in the US. Though some are young men seeking to find glory for the first time, most are ex-regular army men keeping their hand in the only game they know. Many have an instinctive hostility toward communism, but they are essentially apolitical and willing to serve any paymaster. Some such as Colonel Jean Schreime are reputed to have a paternalistic concern for the worldly wellbeing of Africans. Most, however, would just as soon "send a kaffir a day to heaven."

2. In the Congo, this has proved remarkably simple to do. Ever since the mercenaries first became active there in 1960-61, they have enjoyed outstanding advantages, both technological and psychological, in their battles against the blacks. The technological -- superior skill in planning and executing battle and in utilizing sophisticated weapons -- is partly the explanation of the psychological. Thus, the black soldier has good reason to fear the white mercenary as a superior fighter. But there is

- 2 -

S E C R E T

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more to the story. Congolese army units holding clear advantages in number, fire power, and battle position have repeatedly shed their uniforms and made for the bush at the first report that a mercenary force was on the way. At times, Congolese soldiers have sought to save their skins by deserting in droves to the side of the mercenaries.*

3. Such unwillingness to face the white man in battle illustrates the continued strong hold on the Congolese mentality of convictions of the black man's innate inferiority and the white man's invincibility. This inferiority complex is nurtured in childhood with folk tales of the heroic exploits and powerful magic of white men. The conduct of the Belgians as colonists reinforced the black's fear of the armed white man. The large expanse of the Congo and the small size of Belgian garrisons

* Schirame now has several thousand Congolese soldiers with his forces in Bukavu. These are mainly Katangan gendarmes who joined his rebellion at the start, but include army deserters from subsequent battles and near-battles.

S E C R E T

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dictated a security policy of striking quickly and brutally at actual and potential dissident villages. The non-professionalism of the Congo's officer corps, the poor training and discipline of the troops, and the lack of any sense of loyalty to the armed forces or to the Congo as a nation also underlie the cowardly behavior in battle.*

4. In Nigeria, both sides already use a small number of white mercenaries for specialized tasks; e.g., the federal navy depends on a number of white technicians and Biafra's two B-26 bombers are flown by Europeans. We have reliable reports that the federal forces have recently hired Europeans, Americans, and Ethiopians to serve as pilots and ground crews for the dozen jet aircraft recently purchased from the USSR and Czechoslovakia.**

* These same disadvantages contributed to a poor showing by Congo army forces during battles with the Simba rebels during 1964-66. The Simbas were not only better organized but were also believed by army troops to possess magic powers that made them invulnerable to bullets.

** We now hear that Soviet technicians in Nigeria have refused to train Europeans and Americans for these positions, and that the Nigerians are asking Algeria to supply some "mercenaries."

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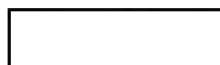
5. If mercenaries were to become active in large numbers in the Nigerian civil war, we believe that their advantage over the blacks, by and large, would be only technological. Sorties flown by mercenary pilots and maneuvers planned and executed by mercenary ground forces could turn the outcome of key battles to the favor of federal forces and, in time, erode the willingness of the Biafrans to continue the struggle. But the Ibos are a relatively well-educated and urbane people. Their officers are professionals, many Sandhurst trained. Their soldiers have been blooded by the battles of the past two months and, though rag-tag by most standards, are considerably more competent and self-confident than their Congolese counterparts. Perhaps most important, Ibo nationalism is fairly highly developed, both as loyalty to fellow tribesmen and as hatred of the common enemy. At least at first, Ibo forces are not likely to panic just because several score white men are approaching. There is some chance, in fact, that the introduction of white mercenaries would cause the Ibos to fight with greater determination.

- 5 -

S E C R E T

S E C R E T

6. In Ghana, the jittery military government has expressed fears that Akrumah is planning to use Communist supplied jet aircraft and a ground force of mercenaries to launch an invasion from his exile base in Guinea. Ghana has native pilots qualified to fly its Italian-built jets. What it now wants is some sophisticated radar equipment to give them the advantage of early warning against any airborne interlopers. We believe that Ghanaian fears of Akrumah's plotting are greatly exaggerated. Moreover, even if Akrumah were to organize and land a mercenary force, we think its chances of success would be poor. The Ghanaian population, especially the military, would not welcome the return of the "Redeemer" and by and large would support the present government. Ghana's soldiers are relatively sophisticated, well-trained, and responsive to a professional officer corps. Thus, in Ghana, as in Nigeria, white mercenaries would probably not enjoy the tremendous psychological advantages that make them invincible in the Congo.



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- 6 -

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